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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-LOOKING
STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In its resolution 1995/30, entitled "Palestinian women", the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation of Palestinian women and to assist them by all available means, and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fortieth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The present report monitors conditions of human rights during the period under review and describes new developments, focusing on projects supported and carried out by the United Nations system. It also discusses emerging concerns and provides suggestions in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The emphasis of the report has shifted from monitoring the general living conditions of Palestinian women to monitoring aspects of their development and human rights, while not neglecting the specific political framework.

* E/CN.6/1996/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with paragraph 260 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for Women, 1/ the situation of Palestinian women and children has been monitored regularly by the Commission on the Status of Women.

2. In its resolution 1995/30, on Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General "to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission ... at its fortieth session a report on the progress made in the implementation" of the resolution. It requested the Commission to continue to monitor and take action with regard to the implementation of the Strategies. The Commission on the Status of Women, in its resolution 39/3, entitled "Women in the Middle East peace process", stressed the importance of, and need for, achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It urged Governments, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations to include women in the peace process and to expedite economic, financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women.

3. Since the signing by the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, on 13 September 1993, the situation in the occupied territories has undergone major changes. Palestinian autonomy has taken shape with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in May 1994, following the signing of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area, and has been further consolidated following the signing of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Elections for a Palestinian Council and for the Ra'ees of the Executive Authority of the Palestinian Council were held on 20 January 1996. The Palestinian interim self-government authority will serve for a transitional period not exceeding five years.

4. As a result of these political developments, the focus of the present report has shifted from that of previous reports: instead of monitoring the general living conditions of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, the present report focuses on the monitoring of violations of human rights that might persist as a result of the occupation and the consideration of women's participation and role in the establishment of a new political, economic and social regime. The report emphasizes aspects of development, accountability and respect for the human rights of women within a specific political framework. This new approach is in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 2/ However, the rapid pace of the political changes of the past year have made it difficult to obtain reliable data and up-to-date detailed information for the report.

I. RESULTS OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

5. The Fourth World Conference on Women, without making reference to any particular national context, considered "women under occupation" in the strategic area of concern "Women and armed conflict". It established a link between the advancement of women and the peaceful settlement of conflicts:

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"An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the principles of non-threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence and of respect for sovereignty as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, is an important factor for the advancement of women. Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development. Armed and other types of conflict and terrorism and hostage-taking still persist in many parts of the world. Aggression, foreign occupation, ethnic and other types of conflicts are an ongoing reality affecting women and men in nearly every region." 3/

6. The Platform for Action acknowledged the necessity for women to contribute to conflict resolution and their crucial role during times of armed conflict and collapse of communities:

"The equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Although women have begun to play an important role in conflict resolution, peace-keeping and defence and foreign affairs mechanisms, they are still underrepresented in decision-making positions. If women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making." 4/

"(Women) often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies." 5/

7. The Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Amman, 9-10 November 1994) makes specific reference to peace in the region:

"A comprehensive and just peace and stability in the region are prerequisites to development and equality. A comprehensive and just peace would free the human and financial resources that are being spent on military equipment and wars, when they could be geared toward development which provides women with equal opportunities for participation." 6/

II. GENERAL LIVING CONDITIONS

8. Despite significant progress in the implementation of the agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization throughout 1995, conditions in the occupied West Bank remained tense, and life in the self-rule areas continued to be affected by measures undertaken by the Israeli authorities, including various military and economic measures that have been detailed in other United Nations reports. 7/ For example, the Israeli authorities sealed the West Bank and Gaza Strip entirely on several occasions, preventing workers with valid permits from entering Israel and East Jerusalem. These measures exacerbated the economic hardship of many families. In view of

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the harsh economic situation, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the occupied territories stated that the standard of living of Palestinians living under the autonomous region of Gaza had declined by 50 per cent since the signing of the Interim Agreement. 8/ A special appeal was launched to the donor community to support the Palestinian authorities in this crucial period.

III. EFFECTS OF THE PEACE PROCESS ON WOMEN

9. The peace process, welcomed by the majority of the Palestinian population, has had a significant impact on the lives of women and the activities of women's organizations. One of the most significant questions has been the release of Palestinian prisoners, including a small number of women, whose health conditions had deteriorated. In accordance with the Interim Agreement, Israel was to release about 1,200 prisoners and detainees, including all female detainees and prisoners as soon as the Agreement went into effect. In October 1995, 21 women were released, but five others were not. Only one woman, who had been in solitary confinement, walked free; 20 others refused to leave their cells, protesting that Israel was not fulfilling its commitment regarding all female prisoners and detainees. The 25 women remaining in prison launched a hunger strike on 10 January 1996 in protest against Israel's continuing refusal to release them. 9/

10. Palestinian women, who played an active role during the intifadah, have remained involved since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Women's organizations and human rights groups formed coalitions in the areas of human rights and legal services. They drafted a bill of women's rights following the release of the Palestinian Draft Basic Law and focused on procedural and administrative law important for its implementation. Women activists undertook a legal analysis of existing laws from a gender perspective and a review of their implementation, which was included in a handbook for legal literacy training. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international standards on women and human rights were widely discussed at the grass-roots level. 10/ The issue was raised about which models or mechanisms for addressing women's issues would be most appropriate in the future government. It was debated whether the recently created Women's Affairs Bureau should be an integrated part of the Palestinian Authority or a separate body. 11/ The Women's Affairs Technical Committee, set up by the Palestinian Authority, became a forum for the concerns expressed by women's non-governmental organizations and dealt with the mainstreaming of gender issues in development policies. Recently a Gender Mainstreaming Department was established within the Ministry of Planning.

11. For the Palestinian elections on 20 January 1996, women's organizations undertook their own preparations. Non-governmental organizations had closely observed the elections in South Africa and the role of the women's charter there. The introduction of a quota system in the Palestinian elections was regarded as controversial at the level of the women's movement. There was concern that, through the quota system, women candidates who were not gender-sensitized would be appointed to governmental posts. It was also asked whether women would stand for election from within their political parties or independently of any political party. Despite the limitations, a view in favour

of the quota system prevailed. Women led protests demanding a quota for women on the Palestinian Council, arguing that women faced difficulties in competing with men in the elections because of the historical inequalities in the male-dominated society. The Palestinian Election Law provided for a system of regulations that determine the number of assembly seats in each constituency in proportion to the population. Based on the registration of voters in the different constituencies, quotas were allocated only for Christians and the Samaritan sect, but no provision was made to ensure an equal representation of women. 12/ According to the Central Election Commission, 1,013,235 Palestinians aged 18 and over were registered in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem to vote in the elections. Forty-nine per cent of the registered voters were women. Among the 676 candidates for the 88-seat legislative council, there were only 28 women (4 per cent). The sole opponent to PLO Chairman Arafat in the election for Ra'ees of the Executive Authority of the Palestinian Council was a woman, Ms. Samiha Khalil of Ramallah. Five women, representing 5.6 per cent, were elected to the Palestinian Council.

IV. ASSISTANCE TO PALESTINIAN WOMEN BY THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

12. During the period under review, a number of projects for Palestinian women were carried out and initiated by the United Nations system and bilateral donors in close cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations.

13. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in addition to its ongoing work for women, financed new projects under the Palestinian Women's Initiative Fund, including a community-run kindergarten in the West Bank and a training workshop in the maintenance and repair of sewing and knitting machines in Gaza. It operated a solidarity group-lending programme in the Gaza Strip to make credit available to women working in micro enterprises and as street vendors in the informal sector of the economy. The programme offered loans averaging \$400 to individual women for the expansion of their income-generating activities. Under the Peace Implementation Programme, it established nine women's programme centres, and construction began for a College of Nursing and Allied Health Science. In the field of education, UNRWA awarded university scholarships to 863 Palestine refugee pupils, including 371 women. 13/

14. THE UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP), through its Gender in Development Programme (GIDP), carried out a variety of projects, including cooperation with the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling on the improvement of Palestinian women's legal status. It organized a workshop for Palestinian media agencies and individuals on the portrayal of gender roles in the media and supported the Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health which aims to improve the provision of health services for Palestinian women by addressing their needs using a life-cycle approach. To improve access to education - so far limited for women in particular due to lack of adequate educational facilities and overcrowding in schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip - classrooms in villages and rural areas were constructed and renovated, primarily for girls. UNDP/PAPP is upgrading a cultural and educational complex in Jericho to provide 23 additional classrooms for primary and secondary girls'

schools and is engaging in an extensive school rehabilitation project to provide supplementary facilities for schools throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including at least 25 classrooms in primary and secondary girls' schools. A school drop-out study, sponsored by UNDP, to be carried out by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, will target Palestinian female youth. Women's enrolment in agricultural schools is encouraged in a project for agricultural education and training which will offer both pre-service and in-service training and target women as 50 per cent of the beneficiaries. The gender-in-development initiatives of UNDP/PAPP include a strategy of upstream interventions which aim at enlarging constituencies in advocacy and working directly with the Palestinian Authority ministries in order to enhance a gender-sensitive approach to policy planning and strategy formulation. They support the established women's units in the various ministries in order to build and strengthen their efforts for mainstreaming gender at the policy level.

15. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) focused on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995), providing support and training to the Palestinian participants at the Conference and the NGO Forum. One specific area of support was institution-building, in particular, efforts to institutionalize gender planning within the emerging bodies of the Palestinian Authority. Other areas were political participation and conflict resolution, with emphasis on awareness-building for women in elections, and follow-up to the Conference, including the preparation of a national strategy for women based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 2/ UNIFEM also launched a permanent WID Facilitation Initiative to coordinate the multiplicity of donors, non-governmental organizations and initiators of WID projects.

16. In addressing the needs of Palestinian children, youth and women, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) moved away from emergency interventions towards longer-term basic services for development and sustainability. For the first time since 1980, when its programme in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was launched, UNICEF could work in cooperation with a central Palestinian authority which provided the framework for planning, policy development and harmonization of basic services to children and women on a national level. Strategies to promote basic education for all, health promotion and empowerment of women were carried out and included, for example, the standardization of women's health services through the development of a Unified Maternal Health card. UNICEF gave priority to programmes reaching out to children in underprivileged communities in refugee camps, rural and urban areas, with special focus on the girl child. Gender issues were integrated into programming and training to upgrade the skills of health care and education professionals. UNICEF also supported the Palestinian preparation for and participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women. For the collection of disaggregated data on health and education indicators, UNICEF launched a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in collaboration with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Support for capacity-building of the Palestinian Authority institutions was a priority for UNICEF in 1995 and included the formulation of a national programme of action in order to ensure political and social mobilization and long-term planning for children, in particular girls.

17. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) undertook jointly with UNRWA and the World Health Organization (WHO) a needs assessment mission, whose recommendations will be taken into account in formulating projects to address the needs of Palestinian women. UNFPA also implemented two expanded maternal and child health and family planning projects in Gaza and the West Bank.

V. EMERGING CONCERNS

18. The need for sustainable economic development has been persistently underlined as crucial to the successful establishment of Palestinian interim self-government. In this respect the international community, including the donor agencies, made substantive commitments and were aware of their responsibility for providing support to the launching of an independent economy and for establishing a viable infrastructure. 14/

19. With regard to the inclusion of gender aspects, the development policies and planning in the Palestinian self-rule areas follow patterns similar to those that have been observed in other developing countries. From a number of critical assessments it seems apparent that women's status and potential roles in socio-economic development and their needs and interests were not given systematic consideration in the preparations of overall economic and social development plans or in the design of development proposals. An important study undertaken by the World Bank, for instance, did not consider women's role in the labour market. In a three-year emergency programme, only a pilot programme for youth and women in development was proposed. 15/ Conversely, the international donor community, particularly through their programmes on women in development, made a commitment to ensuring a more equal role for women in Palestinian society. From 1990 onwards, substantive support has been given for the development of women's institutions, income-generating projects and vocational training. 16/ This has contributed to the launching of small income-generating projects and greater professionalism in the work of the women's organizations, whose relevance for the overall economic development might, however, be questioned.

20. The approach taken in the design of development programmes had an impact on the elaboration of Palestinian national development priorities. Researchers on gender issues have been critical of the form and conceptualization of social entitlements and citizen's rights in the emerging policies of the Palestine authority. They have voiced concern that discussion of the Palestinian economy had been limited to macroeconomic trends and the formal market, with no regard to gender needs. They argued that, in the outline of a gender-biased and unequal system of social support, secure entitlements were based largely on waged employment and women's unpaid contribution; no recognition was given to unremunerated work. Women were not listed as components in the major programmes of national economic reconstruction. The household and, in consequence, women's multiple roles in it were considered important in the social welfare system only in the sense that they would have to absorb shocks and ensure service that could not be provided by the Authority. Scholars also identified a male bias in research, leadership, expertise and staffing by the international community as well as the local implementing authorities. 17/

21. Women's current roles in the economy, in particular in income-generating projects, and other economic projects have been scrutinized by scholars. A number of income-generating projects were set up during the intifadah, including women's cooperatives, home economy projects and a variety of small business projects. An evaluation of these projects found that the majority failed to survive and were closed not long after their establishment. At the root of their failure was disregard for the socio-economic and political context in which they operated. 18/

22. One particular concern of social scientists and policy researchers was the absence of reliable primary data on Palestinian society, which represents a serious obstacle when projects are being defined and future policies outlined. No reliable and comparable gender-segregated data existed on Palestinian women with regard to household composition, labour-force participation, access to property and resources, education or health. The lack was due to the different sources of collection and the number of researchers who could collect data on particular population groups only, such as the refugee population. A national census, as already envisaged by the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, is urgently needed, as are in-depth sectoral and topical studies of selected aspects of society. 19/

VI. CONCLUSIONS

23. Support to Palestinian women during the transitional period was requested by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1995/30. In addition to other United Nations bodies with mandates concerning the Palestinian people, including the United Nations Relief And Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and others, the Commission on the Status of Women has shown a long-term commitment by monitoring the situation of Palestinian women, as set out in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies 1/ and recalled in its various resolutions.

24. In view of the progress achieved in the peace process and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority, the Commission on the Status of Women, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2/ and in view of the shift in its monitoring of the situation of Palestinian women towards aspects of development, accountability and respect for the human rights of women, may wish that appropriate assistance be given to the following:

(a) Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution and decision-making;

(b) In implementing their agreements, the parties concerned should respect the human rights of Palestinian women;

(c) Ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;

(d) Integrate a gender perspective in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects;

(e) Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice;

(f) Prepare for ratification of and accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, without reservations;

(g) Create a national machinery and other governmental bodies for the advancement of women at the highest possible level of government;

(h) Reduce the female illiteracy rate to at least half of its 1990 level;

(i) Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education;

(j) Promote women's economic rights and independence;

(k) Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade;

(l) Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and high quality health care and information and related services;

(m) Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

2/ "Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995", chap. I, sect. 1.

3/ Ibid., para. 131.

4/ Ibid., para. 134.

5/ Ibid., para. 139.

6/ "Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 adopted at the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women" (E/CN.6/1995/5/Add.5, para. 14).

7/ "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories" (A/50/170), covering the period from 27 August to 31 December 1994; "Report of the Special Committee ..." (A/50/282), covering the

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period from 1 January to 31 March 1995; "Report of the Special Committee ..." (A/50/463), covering the period 26 August 1994 to 18 August 1995; "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, and on the Arab population of the Syrian Golan" (A/50/262).

8/ See A/50/170.

9/ The New York Times, 8 October 1995.

10/ Report of the Workshop on Women, at the United Nations International NGO Meeting and European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine; Geneva, 29 August-1 September 1994.

11/ Suha Hindiyeh-Mani, "Working towards self-determination and promoting civil society", paper presented at the United Nations North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine; New York, 19-21 June 1995.

12/ Palestinian election law, FBIS-NES-95-243-S of 19 December 1995.

13/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/50/13), paras. 184 and 205.

14/ See A/50/286.

15/ World Bank, Developing the Occupied Territories: An Investment for Peace, vols. 1-6 (Washington, D.C., 1993).

16/ UNDP, Assistance to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. 1992 compendium of ongoing and planned projects (Jerusalem, 1992).

17/ Rita Giacaman, Islah Jad, and Penny Johnson, "For the public good? PLO and social policy", Working paper No. 2, in Gender and society (Birzeit, Birzeit University, 1995).

18/ Nahla Abdo, "Women and the informal economy in Palestine: a feminist critique", Working paper No. 3, in Gender and society (Birzeit, Birzeit University, 1995).

19/ Lisa Taraki, "Society and gender in Palestine: international agencies", Working paper No. 2, in Gender and society (Birzeit, Birzeit University, 1995).
